

## **Detroit Listening Session Summary**

### **Thursday, March 30, 2006**

Council Members Present: Mattie Jordan-Woods – Northside Association for Community Development, Dan Reeves – Associated Food Dealers of MI, Todd Wickstrom – Heritage Foods USA.

Task Force Participant Present: Kathy Fedder – MI Department of Agriculture.

Kirk Heinze, Director of Communication & Technology Services at Michigan State University's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, facilitated the session, and began with brief remarks and instructions for those present. Kristin Brooks, Executive Coordinator for the Michigan Food Policy Council (MFPC), expressed thanks to Gleaners Community Food Bank for hosting the listening session, presented the work and the charge of the Council, and introduced the Council representatives present. Approximately 20 people were in attendance at the listening session.

There were twelve oral presentations of comments, and no written submissions.

- 1) Kami Pothukuchi, professor at Wayne State University. Dr. Pothukuchi highlighted three major problems that Detroit faces today:
  - a. Lack of access to healthy foods.
  - b. High incidence of hunger and food insecurity.
  - c. High incidence of diet-related disease, including obesity and overweight, diabetes, cancer and cardio-vascular disease.

Dr. Pothukuchi went on to describe some of the resources and opportunities in Detroit. She recommended that these resources need to be systematically, strategically and comprehensively deployed to address the problems that Detroit faces. These resources include:

- d. Nearly 60,000 vacant parcels in public ownership that might be cultivated by residents for food production. Recommends that the MFPC encourage local governments to create land use and zoning policies that allow suitable parcels to be used for urban agriculture
- e. Detroit has a large number of neighborhood-based corner stores that, potentially with some technical and funding assistance, might carry more nutritious and fresh foods through a "corner grocery program" that includes funding and technical assistance.
- f. Eastern Market has the potential to be more of a "food resource center" for Detroit. It can be a showcase local food, including organic; integrate small-scale processing and related enterprises; key source of education about Michigan food systems.

- g. Many grassroots organizations are working on issues of food security and food systems in Detroit. A coalition, with increased funding and capacity, could leverage the energy of these many groups.
- 2) Bruce Schultz, consumer. Mr. Schultz expressed concern over the prevalence of allergenic latex materials (e.g. gloves and balloons) in food preparation, processing, packaging and serving. He recommended that Michigan adopt measures similar to those in Oregon, banning the use of latex products in food handling and service areas.
- 3) Marcia Lee, Earthworks urban farm. Ms. Lee had several recommendations to the MFPC:
- a. MFPC should work to connect the many groups working on food system and food access initiatives all over the state.
  - b. MFPC should facilitate the installation and use of EBT devices in farmers' markets, especially in Eastern Market.
  - c. MFPC should support educational efforts and regional collaborations that connect the relatively wealthy suburbs to the urban core of Detroit.
  - d. MFPC should encourage the use of gardens in school curricula; MFPC should also work with schools to increase the number of school kitchens where children can learn to cook and prepare food.
  - e. MFPC should work with food-system related granting organizations to ensure that the measurable/evaluation component of grants considers the value of repeated and consistent messages to the same clients/consumers, and, therefore recognizes the value of consistent foundation funding for any given project.
- 4) Ida Castillo, Detroit Agriculture Network. Ms. Castillo recommended that the MFPC work to get healthier and more appealing food into the Detroit Public Schools. She recommended that a "food curriculum" be developed for schools. Ms. Castillo also recommended that the MFPC generate lots of publicity around the recommendation report when it is presented to Governor Granholm. She expressed concern that this critical report will just be one of many, and that it will not be available to the public, and it will not be acted upon. Finally, Ms. Castillo recommended that the MFPC strongly support organic and sustainable agriculture in all of its work and policy recommendations.
- 5) Larry Arreguin, Governor Granholm's Southeast Michigan Office. Mr. Arreguin asked two questions of the MFPC:
- a. What is the response to/perceived success of the Select Michigan program?
  - b. Is there a regional partnership working on local food issues in SE Michigan?
- 6) Kathleen Law, Michigan State Representative 23<sup>rd</sup> District. Representative Law mentioned that she has a number of farmers in her district who are always seeking

- new markets for their products. She recommended that the MFPC work to pull together the many networks and initiatives working on these issues.
- 7) Victor Randall, Detroit Agriculture Network. Mr. Randall suggested that the MFPC should provide leadership in a number of areas, and especially in increasing the number of opportunities for local farmers to market their products directly to consumers. Specifically, he recommended that the MFPC work to develop more small farmers' markets all around the metro Detroit areas and especially in Detroit. Mr. Randall also recommended that the MFPC work to integrate food and food security into other state initiatives and grants, such as Cool Cities.
  - 8) Lisa Richter, Capuchin Soup Kitchen and Earthworks urban farm. Ms. Richter stated that the \$20 allowance of Project FRESH coupons is not sufficient, and that this federally funded program should be expanded. She recommended that the MFPC work with farmers and with WIC offices to increase the Project FRESH coupon redemption rate to 100 percent. One way to do this is to increase the number of farm stands and markets located at WIC offices, to facilitate the use of the coupons. She also recommended that the MFPC work to increase the usage of vacant lots for community and urban gardens.
  - 9) Marvin Woods, consumer. Mr. Woods stressed the importance of cooking skills (including canning and preserving) in any nutrition/food security initiatives.
  - 10) Augie Fernandes, Gleaners Community Food Bank. Mr. Fernandes emphasized the need for better nutrition in emergency food assistance services and programs, and this will require a shift away from traditional food-banking strategies. He recommended that the MFPC support the Michigan Agricultural Surplus System (MASS) that receives surplus produce from farmers.
  - 11) Ashley Atkinson, Greening of Detroit and Detroit Agriculture Network. Ms. Atkinson described the work being done by the Greening of Detroit and by the Detroit Agriculture Network. She stated that there are a number of positive initiatives having to do with growing food and creating gardens in the city already underway. She recommended that MFPC support these initiatives and stimulate partnerships among them. She said that generally, people do not realize that the benefits of urban agriculture extend well beyond food production, and that the MFPC should increase education and advocacy around the topics of community gardens and urban agriculture. Ms. Atkinson also recommended that the MFPC be institutionalized and established for a more long-term effort.
  - 12) Carol Izant, Sierra Club. Ms. Izant recommended that the MFPC work with municipal planning units to promote zoning that is more amenable to long-term urban gardening and agriculture. She mentioned that while there are 60,000 vacant parcels in Detroit that might be used for food production, those lots might be pulled out from under urban farmers at any time unless the city of Detroit rezones those lots for agricultural use.

The session concluded with a reminder that the MFPC welcomes written comments and recommendations at any time.